Wayland Residents of South Asian Heritage: A Survey 2023 - Summary of Responses

Overview of Survey Responses
By library volunteer Irene Rideout

The survey received 18 responses, all from Wayland residents. All respondents who specified an ethnicity were Indian, and the vast majority were immigrants from a variety of cities and states across India, the most common being Mumbai. All respondents who provided a birth year were born in the 1970s and 1980s. The most common reasons for coming to the U.S. were for higher education, work, or because of their spouse. A majority of respondents moved to Wayland for the schools; the town's location and neighborhoods were also popular reasons for moving to Wayland. Almost all respondents moved to Wayland since 1999. More than half of respondents knew at least 1 other South Asian before moving to Wayland, but many did not.

Respondents most appreciate Wayland's community, schools, and neighborhoods, and they also like being near nature, the location, and the people. A few do not find anything challenging about living in Wayland, but half described some form of lack of diversity / lack of inclusion / intolerance / racial tension, and some listed town concerns unrelated to race or culture.

Almost half of respondents, or their children, are involved in cultural activities such as dance or music. A few respondents exclusively listed a South Asian language as their primary language at home, but most included English; some listed English exclusively, but more than half listed both English and a South Asian language, and a third described parents speaking a native language to each other and English to their children. Some respondents' children were familiar with their parents' native language, with skills ranging from only being able to understand the language to understanding well and speaking a little to being fluent. A variety of South Asian languages were represented among the respondents, the most common being Hindi and Marathi.

More than half of respondents are involved with at least one of a number of South Asian organizations in the area. Several respondents cited lack of time as a reason for not being involved, while a couple were not aware of any organizations. Many respondents celebrate cultural festivals with family and/or friends; some celebrate at home, a few at local events, and a couple at temple.

Almost half of respondents did not list any challenges in maintaining their cultural heritage. Some described difficulties in celebrating holidays, including not having time off from work and school. A couple respondents indicated not knowing enough people who share their culture. 1 respondent wrote a lengthy and thoughtful answer about many issues affecting immigrants and children of immigrants.

Many respondents did not specify any particular thing they would like others to know about South Asian culture. An equal number of respondents described their nature of being tolerant / inclusive / friendly / welcoming. A third of respondents wanted others to know more about South

Asian culture and traditions, and some wanted others to know of the diversity within the South Asian population. 1 respondent wrote a lengthy and thoughtful answer about their perception of common characteristics of South Asian culture.

Summary of Survey Responses

18 individuals responded to the survey.

Demographics: Those who provided an ethnicity (13 respondents) were all Indian. **[Q1]** All respondents were residents of Wayland. **[Q2]** 2 respondents were raised in Wayland; 16 were immigrants from all across India: 4 came from Mumbai, 2 from Hyderabad, 2 from the state of Kerala, and 1 each from Bangalore, Kolkata, Pune, Shimla, the state of Uttarakhand, and the state of Bihar. **[Q3]** Those who provided a year of birth (15 respondents) were all born in the 1970s and 1980s: 2 were born in the 1980s, 13 in the 1970s, with 11 respondents having been born between 1972-1978.

Moving to the U.S. and Wayland: **[Q4]** When asked why their family came to the U.S., 7 responded with years ranging from 1962 to 2000, with 3 specifying 1998. 5 respondents came for higher education, 4 for work, and 4 followed their spouse; 2 came for better opportunities in general, and 1 specified “better infrastructures and better national principles”.

[Q5] 11 respondents moved to Wayland for the schools, 6 respondents liked the location, and 3 liked the neighborhoods; 2 respondents mentioned their homes, 1 mentioned “affordable price of houses”, and 1 mentioned “highly educated residents”. **[Q6]** 17 respondents provided the year they moved to Wayland: 1 respondent came in 1977, the remaining 16 arrived steadily over the years from 1999 to 2019, with 5 arriving between 1999-2009 and 11 arriving between 2010-2019 (with 3 in 2010, 2 in 2016, and 2 in 2019). **[Q7]** At the time of their arrival, 7 respondents did not know anyone of South Asian heritage in Wayland, 5 knew 1-2 South Asian individuals or families, 3 knew 3-4 individuals or families, and 3 knew 5 or more individuals.

Living in Wayland: **[Q8]** When asked about the most rewarding things about living in Wayland, 8 respondents said the community, 5 said school or school community, and 4 said their neighborhood – though one respondent said, “We have hardly had any neighborly interaction in Wayland.” Other items listed included nature (3 respondents), location (2), people (2), Girl Scouts (1), and their home (1).

[Q9] When asked about the most challenging things about living in Wayland, 3 specified none, while 9 described some form of lack of diversity / lack of inclusion / intolerance / racial tension, including 1 comment saying, “My festivals are not holidays and some of them are celebrated during the day and kid doesn't get a holiday.” 5 respondents had answers unrelated to race or culture; the following items received 1 mention each: the town voting process, housing department rules for home extensions, lack of services, lack of downtown, lack of nightlife, frictional community, and high property taxes.

Maintaining South Asian Culture: **[Q10]** 8 respondents, or their children, do take South Asian arts lessons, while 10 respondents, or their children, do not. **[Q11]** 1 respondent said they

themselves were “an Indian classical dance performer and teacher”. Types of arts lessons included Indian classical dance (4 respondents), music or vocal (2), and henna (1). 1 respondent described the lesson location as “ethnic church access close by”.

[Q12] When asked about the primary language spoken in the house, 3 respondents listed a South Asian language exclusively: 1 specified Kannada, 1 Malayalam, and 1 Telugu. 14 respondents included English, and of those, 4 listed English exclusively, 10 listed a combination of English and a native language. 6 respondents described speaking English with their children while speaking a native language between adults; those languages included Hindi (3 respondents), Marathi (2), Kannada (1), and Malayalam (1); 1 respondent listed multiple South Asian languages between adults: Hindi and Malayalam. Overall, the South Asian languages listed were Hindi (4 respondents), Marathi (4), Kannada (3), Malayalam (2), and Telugu (1).

[Q13] When asked, in general, if they or their kids speak a South Asian language, many answers were unclear whether they applied to the respondent or their children or both. 3 respondents answered no with no further information; 2 answered yes with no further information. Languages listed were Hindi (8 respondents), Marathi (5), Gujarati (2), Kannada (2), Malayalam (1), Telugu (1), and Bengali (1). 5 respondents made statements presumably referring to their children: “They understand Hindi.” / “few words in Hindi but understands” / “They speak Kannada” / “Older one is fluent in Marathi. Understands Hindi. Younger one neither.” / “They somewhat understand Marathi but don't speak”.

[Q14] 7 respondents were not involved with any South Asian organization; of those, 4 cited lack of time as a reason, while 2 were not aware of any organizations. 11 respondents were involved in at least 1 organization; 1 respondent provided a reason: “To keep the connection”. 3 respondents said they were involved in organizations “locally” or within Wayland, but did not provide organization names. Those who provided organization names listed only acronyms, presumed full names are in brackets: 2 respondents listed TiE [The Indus Entrepreneurs], and the following organizations were listed 1 time each: NEMM [New England Marathi Mandal], IAGB [India Association of Greater Boston], Hindi Manch FIA [Federation of Indian Associations], Ifnet [Indian Family Network], NEKK [New England Kannada Koota], “several ngos”.

[Q15] When asked about celebrating cultural festivals, 2 respondents indicated it was difficult due to busy schedules and no days off. 8 respondents celebrate with family and/or friends. 6 respondents celebrate at home, 2 at temple, and 3 mentioned local events. The following events were each mentioned once: Wayland Multicultural Festival, Holi at Boston University, India Day in Boston. Specific celebrations mentioned include Diwali (4 respondents), Ganesha Festival (2), Holi (2), Ugadi (1), Garba (1).

[Q16] 8 respondents did not list any challenges to maintaining their cultural heritage. 5 respondents described being unable to properly celebrate holidays, including 4 describing not having time off from work and school. 2 respondents indicated not knowing enough people who share their culture. Other challenges receiving 1 mention each include maintaining native language, not having family nearby, and “Finding spaces to come together”. 1 respondent wrote

a lengthy and thoughtful answer about many issues affecting immigrants and children of immigrants, including assimilation and acculturation, generational differences, language preservation, discrimination and stereotyping, and many others. (See full text below.)

[Q17] When asked what they would like people to know about South Asian culture, 7 respondents left the question blank. Another 7 respondents described being some variation of tolerant / inclusive / friendly / welcoming. 6 respondents wanted others to know more about South Asian traditions and celebrations, and 4 respondents mentioned the diversity within the South Asian population. Other characteristics listed include peace-loving (2 respondents), spiritual (2), valuing education (2), and hard-working (1). 1 respondent wrote, “Chances are all of our traditions and rituals come from the same ideas... Let our differences be a common ground for us, not a dividing factor.” Another respondent wrote a lengthy and thoughtful answer about their perception of common characteristics of South Asian culture, including believing in God, being respectful of elders and women, valuing education and humility, being social, and many others. (See full text below.)

Tabulation of Responses

18 total responses

#1: **What is your name (optional)**

#2: **What is your email address? (optional)**

#3: **What is your ethnicity (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Sri Lankan, other?**
- Blank: 5
- Indian: 13

1. Are you a resident of Wayland?
- Yes: 18

2. Please list the locality (city, town or village), state and country you were born in.
- 2 were raised in Wayland
- 16 respondents were immigrants.
    - India: 2
    - Mumbai: 4
    - Hyderabad: 2
    - Bangalore, Karnataka: 1
    - Kolkata, West Bengal: 1
    - Pune, Maharashtra: 1
    - Shimla, Himachal Pradesh: 1
    - Kerala (state): 2
    - Uttarakhand (state): 1
    - Bihar (state): 1

3. When were you born? 15 respondents provided their year of birth.
- 1970s: 2
- 1972: 1
- 1973: 3
- 1974: 1
- 1975: 1
- 1976: 2
- 1977: 1
- 1978: 2
- 1982: 1
- 1984: 1

4. Why did you/your family come to the United States?

- 1962: 1
- 1978: 1
- 1996: 1
- 1998: 3
- 2000: 1
- Higher education: 5
- Work/job: 4
- Followed spouse: 4
- For better opportunities, or “education and economic prospects” in general : 2
- “better infrastructures and better national principles”: 1

5. Why did you/your family come to Wayland?

- Schools: 11
- Location (“quiet and remote while still close to shopping and the city”, close to work): 6
- Liked the neighborhoods/Community: 3
- Found a house they liked in town: 2
- “affordable price of houses”: 1
- “highly educated residents”: 1
- Some responded with year: 2000, 2008, 2015, 1977

6. When did you/your family move to Wayland? 17 responses, 1 blank.

- 1977: 1
- 1999: 1
- 2000: 1
- 2003: 1
- 2007: 1
- 2009: 1
- 2010: 3
- 2011: 1
- 2013: 1
- 2015: 1
- 2016: 2
- 2018: 1
- 2019: 2

7. How many people of South Asian heritage did you know in Wayland when you moved here?

- None: 7
- 1-2 individuals or families: 5
- 3-4 individuals or families: 3

- 5 or more individuals: 3

8. What have been the most rewarding things about your time in Wayland?

- Community: 8
- School or school community: 5
- Neighborhood: 4, though one respondent said, “We have hardly had any neighborly interaction in Wayland.”
- Nature: 3
- Location: 2
- People: 2
- Girl Scouts: 1
- House: 1

9. What have been the most challenging things about your time in Wayland?

- “None” or “NTR [nothing to report]”: 3
- 1 respondent’s answer sounded like a list of rewarding things
- Intolerance/racial tension/lack of diversity/lack of inclusion: 9, including a specific comment about not being able to celebrate cultural holidays
- 5 respondents had answered unrelated to race, each item mentioned only once: Town voting process, housing department rules for home extensions, lack of services, lack of downtown, lack of nightlife, frictional community, high property taxes

10. Do/Did you or your kids take South Asian arts lessons (music, dance, henna, etc.)?

- No: 10
- Yes: 8

11. Please list any South Asian arts lessons (music, dance, painting, henna art, etc.) that you or your kids participate in, if any, and where they participate. Only 1 said where: “ethnic church access close by”. 12 blanks or “N/A” or “NTR [nothing to report]”.

- 1 respondent is “an Indian classical dance performer and teacher.”
- Indian classical dance (Bharat natyam): 4
- Music: 2 (1 specified vocal)
- Henna: 1

12. What is the primary language spoken in the house: Among adults? Among children?

- 1 respondent wrote “Msraghi”, may be a typo of “Marathi”?
- 14 included English. Of those, 4 listed English exclusively, 10 listed a mix of English and a native language. 6 indicated English with their kids, but an Indian language between adults (Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam).
- 3 listed Indian language exclusively: Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu
- Number of references for each language:
    - Hindi: 4
    - Marathi: 4

        - Kannada: 3
        - Malayalam: 2
        - Telugu: 1
    - 1 respondent spoke multiple Indian languages between adults: Hindi and Malayalam

13. Do you or your kids speak Hindi, Bengali, Marathi or another language?

- Many answers were unclear whether they applied to the respondent or their children.
- No or none, with no further information: 3
- Yes, with no further information: 2
- Number of references for each language:
    - Hindi: 8
    - Marathi: 5
    - Gujarati: 2
    - Kannada: 2
    - Telugu: 1
    - Malayalam: 1
    - Bengali: 1
- Quotes presumably referring to kids:
    - “They understand Hindi.”
    - “few words in Hindi but understands”
    - “They speak Kannada”
    - “Older one is fluent in Marathi. Understands Hindi. Younger one neither.”
    - “They somewhat understand Marathi but don't speak”

14. Are you involved with a South Asian organization in Wayland or elsewhere? Why or why not?

- No: 7. Reasons, if given:
    - Lack of time: 4
    - Not aware of any: 2
- Yes: 11. Only 1 person provided a reason: “To keep the connection”. Organizations mentioned:
    - Within Wayland: 3
    - Outside Wayland: 1
    - TiE [The Indus Entrepreneurs]: 2
    - NEMM [New England Marathi Mandal]: 1
    - IAGB [India Association of Greater Boston]: 1
    - Hindi Manch FIA [Federation of Indian Associations]: 1
    - Ifnet [Indian Family Network]: 1
    - NEKK [New England Kannada Koota]: 1
    - NGOs: 1

15. How do you celebrate your culture, heritage and festivals?

- 17 responses
- Difficult (busy schedules, no days off): 2
- With family or friends: 8
- At home: 6

- At temple: 2
- Local events: 3 (Wayland multicultural festival, Holi at Boston University, India Day in Boston)

- Celebrations mentioned:
    - Diwali: 4
    - Ganesha Festival: 2
    - Holi: 2
    - Ugadi: 1
    - Garba: 1

16. What challenges do you face keeping your cultural heritage alive?

- Blank or "NTR [nothing to report]": 8
- Properly celebrating festivals and holidays, including not having time off from work and school: 5
- "Not enough people" that share the culture: 2
- Maintaining native language: 1
- Not having family nearby: 1
- "Finding spaces to come together": 1
- [emphasis and formatting added] "Indian Americans face several challenges in keeping our cultural heritage alive in the United States. In our community our challenges include:
  - **Assimilation and Acculturation**: The process of assimilation and acculturation can lead to a gradual erosion of cultural practices and traditions. As we adapt to the dominant American culture, we find it challenging to balance our heritage with the pressure to conform to mainstream norms.
  - **Generational Differences**: Younger generations of Indian Americans often grow up in a different cultural context than the parents or grandparents. They are feel different both among their peers as well as at home. This creates a gap in understanding and practicing traditional customs.
  - **Language Preservation**: Maintaining the use of native languages such as Hindi, Tamil, or Punjabi can be challenging. English is the primary language in the United States, and children prioritize it over their ancestral languages. We do not have the option to teach any of our languages in school as a second language.
  - **Limited Access to Cultural Resources**: We face challenges in accessing cultural resources, such as religious institutions, community centers, and educational programs that promote our heritage.
  - **Discrimination and Stereotyping**: We also face discrimination or stereotyping, which can make it difficult to express their cultural identity without fear of judgment or bias.
  - **Balancing Dual Identities**: We often need to balance our Indian identity with their American identity. This balancing act can be challenging, especially when faced with conflicting expectations and cultural norms.
  - **Maintaining Religious Practices**: For those who follow Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, or other religions prevalent in India, it can be challenging to maintain religious practices and traditions, as access to places of worship and community support is limited.
  - **Cultural Misappropriation**: Some aspects of Indian culture, such as clothing, yoga,

and cuisine, have become popular in the United States. While this can promote cultural awareness, it can also lead to misappropriation and commodification of these traditions.
- **Distance from Homeland**: The physical distance from India can make it challenging to participate in or stay connected with events and traditions back home. Traveling to India regularly may not be feasible for everyone.

Despite these challenges, we actively work to preserve and celebrate our cultural heritage in Wayland through community organizations, cultural festivals, religious institutions, and by passing down traditions within our families."

17. What would you like people to know or understand about South Asian culture or values?

- Blank: 7
- Tolerant, inclusive, friendly, welcoming (of questions, people, diverse perspectives): 7
- Many rich traditions, fun celebrations, when they occur, and what they're about: 6
- Diverse and varied, not a monolith: 4
- Peace-loving: 2
- Spiritual: 2
- Value education: 2
- Hard-working: 1
- "Chances are all of our traditions and rituals come from the same ideas. As a student of Hindu scriptures, I often draw parallels to what I have heard form friends of other religions. Let our differences be a common ground for us, not a dividing factor."
- [emphasis added] "Its hard to speak for "South Asians" as that would cover a lot of people with very **many backgrounds, religions** etc. Most of what I have to say will apply to "Indians" but can apply to a larger extent to south asians as well. First, south asian cultures are primarily **patriarchal**, there is **emphasis on God and worshipping God**. This God may mean different things to different folks depending on ethnicity, religion you come from but idea is to be humble about your existence in this world and be grateful to what you have and respectful to God and respectful to others. South Asians also worship pretty much everything not just God. **Elderly, teachers are highly respected** in the culture. Teachers are actually worshipped. There is a sense of celebration in everything. We like to celebrate and **celebrate in a vibrant way with colors**. If you notice ... weddings or any gatherings are very colorful. At home, though in modern world there is enough freedom to kids, overall there is sense of **obedience to parents and elderly**. South Asians **care a lot about education** and knowledge. That would be higher priority than anything else as they bring up their kids no matter what part of the world they are on. South Asians are born **savers and value oriented**. Saving money, resources is in our blood. Surely with modern times, definition of what "Saving" means has evolved but core idea remains the same. Back in home countries and even here in South Asian homes, you shall find many small things/lessons that will tell you to what extent we are frugal about resources and care to "not waste". **Food is a big part of culture**, you shall find outstanding vegetarian and non-vegetarian food in any part of South Asia. Also food preparation and final product is quite something. It takes long preparation to make food. You could also say that a lot of effort and love goes in it that makes it so much tastier. One thing good to know/understand is South Asian cultures are

not as FORMAL. For eg. after immigrating to US that was a big change. What I mean is that many ways people communicate and understand each other and can be respectful to each other but if they don't say "sorry" or "thank you" its not rude or anything its just not part of culture to be obsessively saying those words. Surely in US all of us including South Asians here are used to and we do follow the practice but just wanted to say that back in India you will not hear those words often. Also depending on culture, religion, ethnicity you come from within South Asia, you will often find that **women are treated with respect**. For e.g. its not common to generally go shake hands with a woman you don't know and meeting first time. Typically the gesture used is "Namaste" with your hands folded. This gesture works for anyone not just women but the norm of how you greet a women / lady in US is a bit different in the sense its normal to be meeting a woman you don't know in professional environment and shaking hands with them. One interesting thing to note is often **kids in these cultures are taught to stay humble and not boast of their qualities, achievements**. Now if you think of this in modern context and in US, its a good thing to be able to speak for yourself but in South Asian cultures you are taught to remain humble. You can speak with your actions but not necessarily with your mouth. Of course with modern times definition of what is considered to be "boasting of oneself" vs "speaking for oneself" has also evolved in those countries too. Talking about **respect for elderly**, it is very very common in South Asians for any young person to go out of their way to go help someone elderly even if you don't know them. For e.g. out on the street or public places if elderly person needs any help, people will not hesitate to go help them in anyway. South Asians are **very social people**. The concept of "social" is literally that way in the sense that if you go to home countries... you may or may not like the fact that people are so "in other people's lives". Now this doesn't mean people are nosy or anything but its very common for people to be socializing in literal sense and helping out or giving advice etc. This is a big contrast in the US where there is indeed concept of "personal space". Though one may think of too much social connection with friends, family being negative.. overall it can also be positive as human beings need social touch (physical social not online) and that is how human minds thrive and evolve. Too much personal space has its own ills causing loneliness, anxiety etc. I would say South Asians in US have learnt the art of balancing it out overall.”